

Jan 26, 2007

SMU law course: A case for higher fees?

By Education Correspondent, Sandra Davie

STUDENTS who sign up for the new law course at Singapore Management University (SMU), with its corporate and commercial law emphasis, will have to pay \$9,000 a year.

SMU will enrol a pioneer batch of 90 law students.

Their fee is \$1,500 more than what other SMU students pay for tuition and is \$2,890 more than the current fee for the law course at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

However, NUS - until now the only full-fledged local university to offer a law course - has indicated that it may have to charge more in the future.

SMU justified the higher fee by saying the 90 students who will begin classes in August this year will be taught by highly trained law and business professors who cost more.

Its law course will have a commercial and corporate bent, with subjects like corporate finance and accounting.

SMU also referred to its low student-faculty ratio. On the law course, seminar groups are expected to hold about 30 students.

Starting salary for a finance professor is about US\$170,000 (S\$260,000) a year. More experienced ones can cost as much as US\$350,000 to US\$400,000.

As for accounting expertise, there are not many PhD holders in that field too.

On SMU's American-style small seminar groups, its president, Professor Howard Hunter, said: 'Students have a lot more individualised attention and close interaction with faculty. It works well in developing their self-confidence, mental agility and communication skills.'

He said SMU will ensure no successful law course applicant will be deprived of a place because of financial hardship. Needy students can apply for bursaries, loans and jobs on campus.

A range of scholarships is also available.

Similar reasons were given by NUS law dean Tan Cheng Han for its possible law course fee hike.

He said NUS has to compete with top law schools around the world, many of which raise their fees on a regular basis.

He said unless NUS increases its fees in the future, it will find it increasingly difficult to compete with these schools for the best faculty.

He revealed that NUS will offer another carrot to incoming law students this year - its new double degree programme which combines law and life sciences.

Separate degrees in law and life sciences would take a student up to eight years in all, but the NUS programme will allow him to finish both in five years.

Students have to meet the requirements for both courses, including A-level passes in a maths and science subject.

With this latest offering, those who enter the NUS law school this year can choose from five double degree programmes combining law with a second degree in life sciences, economics, business, a masters in public policy with the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, and even another law degree from New York University.

Professor Tan said the new combined course is timely. Lawyers with life sciences know-how are in high demand in areas like patent law.

University-bound students welcomed NUS' addition, but five out of the seven students interviewed felt SMU's fees are too high, given that it does not yet have a track record in law.

Said aspiring lawyer Karen Tan, 18, who is awaiting her A-level results: 'I have to think hard about whether the SMU fee is worth paying, given that its law course is new.'

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Fee freeze at 3 universities in view of GST hike Move a surprise as NUS, NTU and SMU had signalled likely rise earlier

By Jane Ng

SINGAPORE'S three local universities will not raise tuition fees this year in view of the upcoming increase in goods and services tax (GST).

The news came as a pleasant surprise to university-bound students and their parents, particularly because the National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Singapore Management University (SMU) have signalled that more fee hikes could be expected.

Last year's increase saw fees at SMU go up by 15 per cent and those at NUS and NTU by 3 per cent.

The recent release of a list of government fees that will be frozen also did not include university tuition fees.

Taxi driver Phil Ng, whose 18-year-old daughter Angeline hopes to enrol in NUS this year, said he is

relieved.

'Any amount I can save on fees is good news, since we will probably have to pay more for other things when GST goes up.'

At SMU, which has a locked-in fee scheme - students pay the same over four years - fees for incoming students will remain at \$7,500 for the first year. But from the second year until they graduate, they will pay \$8,300 a year.

This applies to all incoming students except those entering its new law programme, who will pay \$9,000 a year.

Current students are not affected by the revision.

The other two universities do not have a locked-in fee scheme, but both are considering introducing one.

For this year though, NTU's fees will remain at \$6,110. Fees for returning national servicemen will be based on the year they were offered a place in the university.

At NUS, the annual tuition fee also stays at \$6,110 for most courses, \$7,570 for a music programme and \$17,520 for a medicine or dentistry course.

An NUS spokesman said that while the costs of running the university's programmes will rise with general inflation, NUS will absorb these increases.

'We will be launching several new and innovative educational programmes in the coming academic year, as well as continuing with ongoing efforts to further enhance existing programmes,' she said.

To ensure university education remains affordable, the universities have a range of financial help schemes for students. SMU also has a student employment unit to help students find part-time jobs off-campus to help with their educational expenses.

MP Amy Khor, who is a member of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Education, sees the fee freeze as a gesture on the part of the Government to assure Singaporeans that it is keeping an eye on costs.

'This especially applies to middle-income households, many of which may have children going to university. Some of them are worried that they may not get as big a help package, so this will definitely help to mitigate their worries,' she said.

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